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63rd plenary meeting
Thursday, 21 November 1996, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 21 *(continued)*

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/172)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/51/213, A/51/303, A/51/315, A/51/326, A/51/353, A/51/356, A/51/464, A/51/528, A/51/560)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.22 and A/51/L.24)

(d) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/171)

Mr. Bohayevsky (Ukraine): The delegation of Ukraine wishes to take this opportunity to present our views on two issues that are related to the agenda items.

Our first concern is the arrangement of special economic assistance to countries that have experienced the negative consequences to their economies of sanctions imposed by the Security Council against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

We have carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General on this issue (A/51/356), which provides a sound basis for the further analysis and consideration of this problem. At the same time, this document, in our view, contains no evaluation of the effectiveness of joint efforts within the United Nations system or recommendations of a universal nature in this regard.

We support the conclusion contained in this report that new and additional financial resources from all potential funding sources, especially at the bilateral and regional levels, are necessary to address a variety of persisting economic problems of the affected States, in particular the long-term effects of sanctions on their economies.

The conclusion of the Dayton Peace Agreement opened good prospects for the establishment of lasting peace and stability in the Balkans, and that was a very important achievement. As a result of progress made in implementing the Peace Agreement, the sanctions were lifted, but their effects have not yet been eliminated or even mitigated.

The delegation of Ukraine considers that the issue of special economic assistance to countries affected by the sanctions regime should remain on the agenda of the

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United Nations, taking into account the fact that the previous resolutions on the issue have not been duly implemented, at least with respect to my country, which has not received adequate assistance to cover the tremendous losses caused by its strict and consistent observance of the sanctions regime.

In this context, I would like to note that the Security Council imposes sanctions on behalf of the whole international community and, therefore, all United Nations Member States should bear the responsibility for their implementation and their consequences.

The recent experience of Ukraine has also revealed that there is a need for a comprehensive and unified methodology for determining and evaluating the economic situation of non-target States so as to assess their losses with a view to reducing the negative impact of sanctions on their economies.

In document A/51/226, Ukraine has proposed specific measures as possible elements of the compensation mechanism. Such a mechanism, *inter alia*, should provide for the opening of special lines of credit by international financial institutions to render direct financial assistance to third countries to support technical projects carried out in those countries. The donor countries should introduce, on a bilateral or multilateral basis, trade preferences for third countries, including promotion of their exports. The donor countries should also support, on a bilateral and multilateral basis, investments in the economies of third countries, with special preference being given to the spheres that sustain direct losses from the sanctions.

In the case of Ukraine, such measures could be supplemented, for instance, by reducing its contribution to the financing of peacekeeping operations and by introducing a special regime of participation in post-conflict reconstruction and development.

Our delegation also considers it expedient to create, under Article 29 of the Charter of the United Nations, a standing Security Council sanctions committee. It could be given responsibility for estimating the economic losses of the affected States, conducting research on the regional economic and socio-economic consequences of sanctions, coordinating measures to minimize their after-effects, monitoring their strict observance and so on.

Our second, but no less significant concern is how to solve the problems caused by the Chernobyl disaster, which continue to seriously affect the environment and people's health. Over the past years, the scale of the tragedy has emerged very clearly and the problems of coping with the consequences require immediate solutions.

Our delegation shares the concern expressed by previous speakers about a lack of sufficient coordination in the efforts of the United Nations Secretariat and organizations and agencies of the United Nations system in Chernobyl-related activities. In this connection, our delegation would like to support measures aimed at developing long-term international cooperation in the second post-Chernobyl decade. We still believe that these problems have a global dimension and that they therefore require special attention and adequate involvement on the part of the entire international community.

We are clearly conscious of the many problems of various kinds and dimensions facing our Organization today. However, the two problems to which we have drawn the attention of this Assembly should continue to be placed on the list of priorities.

Mr. Ahmad (Malaysia): Malaysia joins other delegations in expressing its appreciation for the efforts that have been and are being undertaken by the United Nations and its agencies towards providing humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, including special economic assistance. My delegation also shares the views that have been expressed on the need for better coordination in providing this assistance, as the world continues to face the challenges of disasters and emergencies in Zaire and other places.

My delegation would now like to talk in some detail on sub-item (d), which relates to the question of assistance to the people of Palestine. Malaysia would like to express its appreciation for the Secretary-General's report (A/51/171). My delegation feels that the report provides a comprehensive background to activities that have already been undertaken and are being planned for the development of Palestine and the social and economic improvement of the Palestinian people. We particularly applaud the efforts that have been made towards meeting the needs of the Palestinian people in the fields of education, employment generation, health, infrastructure, institution-building and the development of the private sector.

My delegation is also gratified that, as a result of the Paris Ministerial Conference on Economic Assistance to the Palestinian People, approximately $805 million has been pledged by donors for investment projects. The

report also informs us that an additional $72.5 million has been pledged towards the 1996 Palestinian Authority recurring budget deficit, projected at $75 million. My delegation, however, believes that these pledges are not sufficient. We take this opportunity to urge the international community to continue to contribute the much needed funding to assist the Palestinian people in rebuilding their economy and their nation.

Even as we welcome these projects, we must remind ourselves of the reality of the situation on the ground. The Secretary-General, in his report, commented on the severe setback to peace and development brought about by the suicide attacks in February, and on the devastating effect the attacks had on the Palestinian economy. As a result, domestic unemployment has risen sharply because business, trade and commerce have no access to external markets. An estimated 70,000 Palestinians who were working in Israel at that time were unable to enter the State owing to the closure of the occupied territories by the Israeli regime.

In September of this year, the world witnessed the eruption of yet another spate of violence; this time brought about by Israel's blatant act of provocation in opening a tunnel in the immediate vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This deeply upset and angered the Palestinians, as well as the Muslim world. Malaysia and other Muslim countries have condemned what happened, which was born out of Israeli insensitivity towards Palestinian and Muslim feelings.

The grim reality is that all the planning and projections will come to naught if the situation on the ground does not permit the quick and effective implementation of the development projects defined by the United Nations and its agencies. All the monetary resources at our disposal will also mean nothing if these resources cannot be put to good use to help the Palestinians.

I would once again like to stress that it is imperative that the momentum towards a successful conclusion of the peace process in the Middle East should not merely be maintained, but should be genuinely pursued by all sides. Any attempt to disrupt the peace process would only aggravate instability and bring about renewed violence and further unrest, maybe even a bigger or unlimited escalation. This can only be to the detriment of the development of Palestine and consequently to overall peace and stability in the region.

Israel, too, could not escape those consequences, so it is to its advantage to implement the Middle East peace process scrupulously and immediately. I repeat: the present Israeli Government must honour all peace agreements that Israel has made with the Palestinian Authority. Any departure by the Israeli Government from these agreements would dash all hopes of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians and the Arab and Muslim world.

Malaysia would like to reaffirm its total commitment to and solidarity with the Palestinian people and its leadership in the attainment of its inalienable right to self-determination and to exist in peace as an independent and sovereign State.

The strengthening of the economy and the improvement of the living conditions of the Palestinians is a critical element and a prerequisite — a condition for a lasting peace and security. The people of Palestine must be assisted, to enable them to stand on their own feet. This is a commitment which the international community must strive to fulfil as quickly as possible.

Mr. Avalle (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I address the Assembly at a time when the international community is engaged in seeking a solution to the extremely grave situation of the refugees in the Great Lakes region. This dramatic situation once again underscores the responsibility and the moral obligation that we all have to relieve the suffering caused by emergency situations and to assist the affected peoples to rebuild and rehabilitate their societies once the emergency is over.

By resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, the General Assembly gave the Organization an explicit mandate to act rapidly and in a coordinated manner to provide adequate humanitarian assistance to countries affected by natural disasters or by other kinds of emergencies.

In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to express my Government's appreciation for the work done by Mr. Yasushi Akashi as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. We believe that his activities in such a complex area are a clear example of dedication and leadership, which deserve recognition.

We agree with the Secretary-General that extreme poverty significantly increases social vulnerability, which, combined with the political fragility of a society, creates a situation that can easily lead to humanitarian catastrophe. It is for this reason that we believe that it is

vital to move forward in designing early warning mechanisms that will enable the United Nations to identify potential conflicts and provide the necessary assistance before it is too late.

Undoubtedly, given the enormous humanitarian demands made by the world today of the Organization, it must be provided with new and appropriate mechanisms to tackle this challenge. This is why the Argentinean President, Carlos Menem, in October 1993 presented an innovative idea in this Assembly that was supported by an overwhelming majority. This idea, better known as the White Helmets Initiative, quickly became a reality in the United Nations system's activities related to humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for development. We are pleased to see, five years after that event, that the Secretary-General, in his report on the work of the Organization and in the report now before us, recognizes the political and institutional importance of the initiative as well as its operational and financial viability.

Our experiences in Haiti, Jamaica, Palestine, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Angola and Armenia have also shown us ways to improve the ways in which the White Helmets are deployed and provide assistance in emergency situations. Moreover, and it is important to emphasize this, they have shown us ways of improving rehabilitation and economic reconstruction in the countries requiring such assistance. The substantial financial support and the confidence shown by various countries, such as France, Germany, Italy and Saudi Arabia, have undoubtedly been a critical element in this success.

In the particular case of the Great Lakes region, Argentina is finalizing the logistic aspects with a view to sending an aircraft with supplies and a contingent of White Helmets to the region to supplement the work already being done by the United Nations. In this respect, we would like to underscore the role played by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Sadako Ogata, in the Great Lakes region. We are working closely with her in completing the final details of our operation.

However, we would like to add that we believe that United Nations activities should not end once the humanitarian emergency has disappeared from the front-page headlines. For this reason, we have proposed that the White Helmets should participate in the reconstruction of the economy, and in particular help to build housing in Rwanda.

In conclusion, we believe the United Nations should play a significant role in the international system of the twenty-first century. In this context, one of the major challenges we face on the threshold of the new century is the need to find mechanisms that will make it possible to relieve the pain and suffering caused by disasters and emergencies of all kinds. Without a solution to this question, sustainable development and the viability of future generations will undoubtedly be seriously compromised.

Mr. Awaad (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Under this agenda item, the statement of the Egyptian delegation will relate to the assistance provided by donors in the United Nations to the Palestinian people. I do not believe I am stating anything new when I draw the attention of this Assembly to the range of assistance and support that the Palestinian people has received from the Government and people of Egypt.

The Madrid Conference in 1991 and the Oslo negotiations in 1993, as well as all the subsequent conventions that were signed thereafter, represented important milestones along the path of the Palestinian people towards self-determination. This has required Egypt to contribute to the extent of its possibilities to improve the fraternal Palestinian people's ability to manage its internal affairs and control the economic situation to the benefit of that people, which has suffered and continues to suffer the negative consequences of foreign occupation. This assistance and support are particularly necessary because of the situation in the West Bank and Gaza as a result of the breakdown of the peace process and the arbitrary action taken by Israel — the blockade and the blockage of the circulation of workers and business people imposed in that area. This further deepens the tragedy of the Palestinian people.

After the election of the Palestinian Authority, Egypt offered its support to permit that Authority to take office. President Mubarak helped in setting up a committee to determine how each Egyptian Government ministry could help in promoting the work of each part of the Palestinian Authority. A number of agreements were signed with the Palestinian Authority, such as those relating to transport, communication, postal services and so forth. Agreements were also drawn up to establish institutional links between the organs of that new and young State and their counterparts in Egypt, which in practice is reflected in the assistance provided by Egypt in the areas in which the agreements have been signed. Egypt has also helped to train some high-level Palestinian police officers who now

form the core of the Palestinian police. They carry out their national duties with great competence and on the basis of strict discipline. In addition, Egypt has offered its services to those senior staff chosen as spokespersons abroad to promote the cause of Palestine and represent it in international bodies.

Egypt has also taken part, along with other parties, in a range of tripartite cooperation arrangements, providing technical expertise to the Palestinian people. Here I would like to refer to the agreement between Norway and the Palestinian Authority with a view to training nursing managers for the medical services to help meet the great shortage among the Palestinian people.

We have also worked on the development of the Port of Gaza in order to make it an important outlet, enabling Palestine to have communications with the outside world. Throughout, Egypt has been participating in various economic projects to enhance the performance of the Palestinian economy and to save it from the arbitrary restrictions imposed by Israel, which could have very damaging effects if they continue.

Egypt's role is not confined to providing moral or physical assistance or assistance in kind. Egypt is doing its utmost to prompt all other friendly countries to increase their assistance and their commitment with a view to helping the Palestinian Authority so that the Palestinian leaders may realize their dreams that the Palestinian people, who have so long suffered oppression and displacement, might enjoy the fruits of peace.

I should like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and all other relevant bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations system for providing the requisite support to the Palestinian people. I should like also to pay tribute to Mr. Larsen, the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, for the integrated and targeted programme that was adopted in June 1995. It is important for coordination to be strengthened among all the bodies of the United Nations system, and among them, the donor countries and the Palestinian Authority. During the Ministerial Conference on Economic Assistance to the Palestinian People, held on 9 January 1996 in Paris, all the parties concerned reaffirmed their commitment to increasing assistance to the Palestinian people on the basis of the priorities established for development activities. The role of the Special Coordinator, who has already done praiseworthy work, should be enhanced so as to minimize the negative effects of decisions taken with regard to the closure of the borders and the blockade.

We should also like to pay tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the initiatives taken by its Commissioner-General, and the international coordination that it is providing in terms of organizing assistance to the Palestinian people. We believe that, as a result of our efforts and assistance, the Palestinian people will be able to take their first steps along the road to economic development. We should like to pay tribute to all the countries of the world that are committed to providing such assistance. We urge them to fulfil their promises. We also appeal to all countries that have not yet provided assistance in this regard to do so in order to achieve this lofty objective, which will promote peace in the Middle East as a whole and will be of particular benefit to the Palestinian people, who are courageously trying to establish their own state in their own territory.

Mr. Manor (Israel): The world faces enormous humanitarian challenges in Africa — the most recent in eastern Zaire — and in other regions of the world. Throughout the world there is a direct connection between economic prosperity and political stability. Likewise, there must also be a strong link between relief and assistance operations and sustainable economic development.

The State of Israel is fully aware of the importance of economic growth and prosperity to the political stability of the Middle East. Israel therefore supports the provision of substantial economic assistance to the Palestinians, which will help to achieve a greater measure of peace and stability in our region. It should be noted that Israel has taken active steps to contribute to the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the Palestinians. In fact, the donor countries are meeting in Paris this week, with Israel's active participation, to review the state of contributions to the Palestinians. We welcome the concerted efforts of Member States, international financial institutions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to aid the development of the West Bank and Gaza.

For many years, Israel has been cooperating fully with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as with other international organizations, in implementing programmes aimed at improving the living conditions of

the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It is our view that the United Nations should increase its efforts and funding to assist the Palestinians in the territories, thereby facilitating the successful implementation of the agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinians.

The State of Israel is fully committed to the implementation of all the agreements signed between Israel and its neighbouring countries and with the Palestinians. The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement and the Israel-Jordan peace treaty are momentous achievements on the road to peace. They open new opportunities for economic and social progress, cooperation, prosperity and peace for our region. The Middle East peace process deserves the support of the international community.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to extend, on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, sincere thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report relating to the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance. This clearly reflects the nature of the humanitarian situation prevailing in the world, especially in the developing countries. We would also like to express our great appreciation for the humanitarian efforts undertaken by the relevant Departments and competent organizations and agencies of the United Nations system to mitigate the suffering of the peoples affected.

While the international community recognizes the gravity of the deteriorating humanitarian crises, whether they result from natural disasters or from armed conflicts, international efforts in numerous regions of the world are still unable to tackle some of these crises. This, in turn, affects the future and welfare of humankind.

The delegation of the United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to the provision by developed countries of developmental and economic assistance to developing countries to help them to achieve human, social and economic self-development. We affirm the importance of strengthening international coordination, especially among United Nations agencies and specialized international development organizations — foremost among which is the World Bank — in order to mobilize and help the flow of economic resources to support millions of poor people in overcoming their socio-economic problems and building the infrastructures of their societies.

On the basis of its humanitarian beliefs and convictions, which derive from its society's traditional culture and civilization and from the tolerant teachings of the shariah of Islam, and under directions from the President of the State, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the United Arab Emirates has been eager to provide all forms of support to many developing countries, especially those that have been victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts, as is the case in Palestine, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan and other countries.

In pursuit of its humanitarian policy in this regard, the United Arab Emirates has established philanthropic organizations, foremost among which are the Sheikh Zayed Foundation and the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society. These organizations have been established to mobilize public and private sector efforts and to respond to human needs in affected areas of the world, especially in numerous developing countries.

The persistence of poverty, the deterioration of the environment and the failure to settle disputes in accordance with the principles of the Charter and the rules of international law have greatly contributed to the expansion and complication of armed conflicts throughout the world. The experiences of the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Somalia and the Great Lakes region in Africa are but a few examples. Thus, it is incumbent on the international community to enhance its peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts and to promote post-conflict peace-building in order to secure stability and reinvigorate the development of the peoples affected by these conflicts.

Concerned by the increasing suffering of millions of victims of natural disasters, emergency situations and armed conflicts and by the attendant loss of life, flows of refugees, mass displacement of populations and infrastructure devastation, the United Arab Emirates declares its support for international efforts to assess and enhance the capacity of the United Nations and its specialized agencies to address these grave international humanitarian problems and to strengthen the participation of the international community. In this regard, we affirm the importance of establishing a database to facilitate the prompt response to potential emergencies and to establish an early warning system to prevent humanitarian crises from deteriorating, particularly since such deterioration can be difficult to contain in both the short and long terms.

Statistics show clearly the recession of the base economy of Palestine since the Oslo negotiations. This is a result of the coercive measures that the Israeli occupation authorities have taken against the Palestinians. These include the closing off and sequestration of the occupied Palestinian territories, the imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from the cities of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the erection of obstacles to the implementation of the assistance programmes of international humanitarian agencies. These measures have led to the spread of poverty, hunger and disease among the Palestinians and their impact is reflected in the fact that Palestine's gross national product has been reduced by more than 50 per cent and its level of unemployment has risen to more than 63 per cent. These figures are the greatest indicators of the deterioration of Palestinian society under the Israeli occupation. The Israeli measures constitute a blatant violation of the peace accords and of all relevant international norms and instruments.

The United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to the strengthening of international development assistance for the Palestinian people so as to enable it to establish its national structures and to develop its technical skills and capacities in order to promote economic and social development. We call upon the international community and the donor States to honour the commitments they have made so as to secure a decent life for the Palestinian people and to enable it to achieve its aspirations to self-determination and to establish an independent state on its national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: In accordance with resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, and 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset, I would mention that, as regards a procedural problem we have faced, we will continue to work towards a solution of all such problems in full cooperation with the President of the General Assembly.

The economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the living conditions of the Palestinian people there have actually worsened over the last two years. In fact, the economic situation and living conditions are in many respects worse now than they were before the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993. The gross domestic product dropped by about 9 per cent in 1995 and projections indicate that it will likely fall by about 15 per cent this year. The per capita income of Palestinians has dropped from $2,600 to $1,800, while in Israel, for instance, the per capita income is approximately $16,000. The Palestinian unemployment rate has reached the unprecedented and dangerously high level of 50 per cent. Furthermore, Palestinian exports have also dropped, the budget deficit of the Palestinian Authority is increasing and accompanying social and political problems are on the rise.

Donor countries have delivered some of their pledged contributions, which stood at $2.4 billion at the Washington summit in October 1993 and were to be disbursed over a five-year period. The distribution of the aid, however, has been slow and marred by all types of problems. Furthermore, even this amount of international assistance has been offset by Israeli policies and measures, which have been the main cause of the deterioration of the situation and have practically precluded — in fact, strangled — any economic improvement and growth.

At the forefront of these Israeli policies and measures is the closure of the Palestinian territory, which in reality has meant the obstruction of the freedom of movement of persons and goods within the West Bank, between the West Bank and Jerusalem, and between the West Bank and Gaza, in addition to the restriction of movement to and from Israel and the outside world. This closing off has also prevented Palestinian workers from taking any jobs in Israel, even though, as part of Israel and Palestine's economic agreement, this arrangement was accepted in exchange for others. The financial losses caused by the closure are estimated to be $7 million per day.

The Israeli authorities have also caused various problems and created impediments, preventing any progress or the completion of any important infrastructure projects related to trade and other sectors of the economy, including the agreed industrial parks and the construction of the seaport and airport in Gaza. Moreover, the Israelis have waged a campaign to obstruct any independent Palestinian franchising rights for foreign companies, essentially obstructing possible Palestinian joint ventures with foreign capital. The Israelis have also repeatedly failed to meet their responsibilities under the agreement with regard to the reimbursement of collected customs and value added tax on goods imported by the Palestinian side.

Such dangerous policies and practices not only violate the agreements reached so far, but they are unjustifiable under any security pretext, and are illogical

regardless of the political goals or orientation of any Israeli Government. Some such measures can only be perceived as emanating from an ill desire for collective punishment and for vindictive control of the Palestinian market and economy.

It is time for the Israeli side to understand that these policies must be immediately halted and reversed. Closures and seizures must stop immediately. Clearly, it is impossible to speak of regional cooperation or to achieve meaningful results at economic regional summits while the Palestinian economy is being destroyed. In fact, we cannot even speak of peace while such an economic situation prevails. The obstruction of development and rehabilitation is an obstruction of the peace process in its entirety.

In spite of all the above, the Palestinian Authority has been trying very hard to improve the living conditions of our people and to build our institutions and economy. For this to succeed, however, we need both a completely different Israeli attitude — in compliance with international law and the agreements reached — and international assistance. Only yesterday the Palestinian side at the highest level presented our national investment plan for the year 1997 to a donor meeting in Paris. We hope that the international community will provide its full support for this plan.

The Palestinian people greatly appreciates the efforts of the international community to assist it in its new and challenging task of building our country and its institutions during this critical period of transition. In this context, we would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all those countries and organizations that have generously provided assistance to the Palestinian people. It is our strong hope that the international community will fulfil its pledges to help us to repair our devastated economy and thus alleviate the worsening living conditions of our people.

We also continue to believe that the United Nations has an important and essential role to play in assisting the Palestinian people. At this time, we would like to express our appreciation for the thorough and detailed report presented by the Secretary-General under this item. We would also like to express our appreciation of the efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories and of the significant role of his Office in facilitating the organization of the work of the United Nations agencies by means of an effective coordinating mechanism on the ground. These efforts have greatly enhanced United Nations activities in the Palestinian territory. In particular, we should like to mention the programmes carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We believe that the draft resolution on this item does not accurately reflect either the realities of the situation on the ground or the difficult and worsening conditions faced by the Palestinian people and the state of the peace process at this stage. However, we understand the importance of maintaining a consensus on this issue, and we are ready at this session to maintain the consensus text.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Fallet (International Committee of the Red Cross) (*interpretation from French*): The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is closely following the debate on "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations" and is grateful for the opportunity of again sharing a few observations on this topic.

In our opinion, the two main issues at stake with regard to humanitarian coordination are how best to serve the interests of victims in an effective and coherent way and how to make the best use of donor funding. Accordingly, the ICRC practical approach to humanitarian coordination is primarily guided by its focus on victims and by its own accountability to donors.

In recent years, we have noted that effective humanitarian coordination has mostly occurred at the field level and has usually been a process initiated by the humanitarian organization which has been the first or the prime operational actor in an emergency. During the current year, the ICRC has played this role in such places as Chechnya, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka and in certain areas of Somalia, Sudan and Sierra Leone. It has also continued to perform its leading role in tracing missing people and re-establishing family links, coordinating its large-scale operations in this domain with those of other organizations concerned with such matters in places such as the Great Lakes region of Africa and the former Yugoslavia.

The ICRC feels that field coordination works best when humanitarian organizations accept a common set of

ethical and operational standards, such as those laid down in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations, and when they aim at achieving true complementarity with due respect for each other's mandates and roles. A good example of effective field coordination has been set in Angola, where humanitarian organizations have established sound coordination mechanisms and mutually complement their respective activities. Such efforts, aimed at pragmatic cooperation in the field, and founded on a common humanitarian approach, deserve to be pursued and developed in all emergency or post-conflict situations where a multitude of humanitarian agencies are responding to the needs of victims.

Parallel to operational coordination in the field, the ICRC is also paying increasing attention to coordination and consultations at headquarters level. In the course of this year, it has held several very useful senior management meetings with some of its main operational humanitarian partners. In addition to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, such meetings took place with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as some major international non-governmental organizations.

In early September, there was an exchange of letters between the President of ICRC, Mr. Sommaruga, and the Executive Director of WFP, Mrs. Bertini, at headquarters level on the terms of cooperation between the two organizations and on guiding principles for relief operations in emergency situations due to conflict. A few months ago, an ICRC delegation signed a field level agreement in Rwanda with the country office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, defining the respective responsibilities of the two institutions with regard to protection and visits to detainees in that country.

This bilateral approach has not only served to enhance mutual understanding, but has also been instrumental in paving the way for closer institutional relations and sectorial coordination and cooperation. The ICRC will pursue this approach with its operational partners as an important component of its coordination efforts.

At the multilateral level, the ICRC's prime focus is to assume its role and responsibilities within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and to maintain close coordination with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and their Federation. In addition, the ICRC actively participates in United Nations coordination mechanisms in order to promote synergy and coherence within the humanitarian community.

At this juncture, we should like to touch briefly on the important role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs as the United Nations humanitarian advocate and facilitator of operational coordination. Its efforts to raise issues within the United Nations system, such as that of the impact of economic sanctions or respect for humanitarian mandates, as well as its activities in areas such as demining or the gathering and sharing of information on humanitarian operations and issues, are examples of the Department's functions that deserve special recognition.

We also wish to refer to the issue of anti-personnel landmines as an example of commendable inter-agency cooperation. It is indeed encouraging for the ICRC to see that its worldwide campaign for a total ban on these dreadful weapons has contributed to increased and concerted humanitarian advocacy and mobilization on the part of a large number of organizations.

Some of the recent emergencies — such as those in Liberia, Burundi or currently in eastern Zaire — have shown how important it is for humanitarian organizations and international or regional political bodies to remain in contact and for them to be assigned clearly defined tasks. In this area, it seems sometimes that the international community, finding itself unable to act, pushes the humanitarian agencies to the forefront rather than seeking political solutions.

The ICRC considers it urgent, today, that we go beyond coordination among humanitarian organizations in emergency situations. We must, *inter alia*, enhance consultation with the appropriate political bodies as well as with other bodies that intervene in pre- or post-conflict situations. The ICRC therefore maintains regular bilateral contacts with the Security Council as well as with the most important regional political and security organizations, such as the Organization of African Unity, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of American States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The recent emergency situations we have mentioned have clearly demonstrated once again that in many instances it is important to better define the responsibilities and operations of humanitarian organizations on the one hand, and of political organs on

the other, and to better ensure that the activities of both groups have the necessary political and financial support.

In this same context, we should like to reiterate that humanitarian operations cannot take the place of political action. Humanitarian agencies can neither address the underlying causes of conflict nor bring about peaceful settlements; they can neither establish law and order nor guarantee the security conditions necessary for humanitarian activities to be carried out, excluding the possibility of any unacceptable risk for the recipients of the assistance and for the personnel of the organizations. In such situations, humanitarian work therefore depends largely on measures that must be taken, firmly and with determination, on the political front.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I call now on the observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Pedersen (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The demands being placed upon the humanitarian agencies, such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, its member national societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), are increasing, and the circumstances in which we operate are becoming ever more complex.

It is therefore increasingly important to clarify the difficult issues that confront all actors in the humanitarian field, and to review comprehensively the way in which the organizations act and interact with one another and with other agencies involved in these situations. In this context, the International Federation appreciates very much the report of the Secretary-General, contained in document A/51/172, on which the current debate is based.

We should like, however, to make a few remarks on some of the topics dealt with in that report. The International Federation is fully aware of the need, brought out in the report, to relate humanitarian work to wider concerns of an economic, social and ecological nature. It is, nevertheless, necessary to proceed with caution in this context. Such linkage could easily invite pressure to compromise humanitarian principles and standards in order to achieve worthwhile, but less certain, longer-term benefits for the populations in question.

In this context, we note and agree with the argument in favour of the need for agencies to be more predictable, or, in other words, to have consistent, high-quality, known areas of competence, an issue that was also brought out in the evaluation of the Great Lakes operations earlier this year. On our side, a similar argument led to the code of conduct that was developed by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in collaboration with a number of prominent international non-governmental organizations, and which was welcomed by the more than 130 Governments participating in the twenty-sixth International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference, held in Geneva last December.

Setting standards is also of great importance in the development of tools to achieve better monitoring and evaluation, whether of the programmes of the United Nations agencies or of others. In this respect it might be of value to note that the International Federation and the ICRC, in collaboration with a number of non-governmental organizations, are involved in the development of technical standards that may be adopted on a voluntary basis when they become available.

Recognizing that prevention and preparedness are the most effective way to reduce conflict-induced human suffering, the International Federation appreciates very much the work performed by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in developing an early warning system within the Department. The Department's Integrated Regional Information Network is excellent, and we want to congratulate the Department on it.

The International Federation would like to emphasise its support for the views expressed in the report on the need for post-conflict rehabilitation, and on the need to use relief and development to support peace processes. The International Federation has been trying to do so in its sphere of work — in particular in Somalia and in the former Yugoslavia — and is gaining considerable experience in both the benefits and the difficulties of such activities.

It is particularly important, we feel, to emphasize the development of local capacities to deal with difficulties in a local setting. We would, however, like to emphasize that local capacity can be built only by the local people, and that outside agencies must play a supportive and facilitating role. Recent experience has shown that international agencies need to be more modest about their capacity for direct intervention, as well as about their ability to build durable structures if these are not based on the input of the parties most concerned.

A recent illustration of the importance of local capacities was the ability of the volunteers and staff of the Zairian Red Cross to continue operating in the absence of direct external support during the crisis in eastern Zaire.

Another illustration can be found in the work of the Somali Red Crescent Society, which has been able to perform its humanitarian work in a country where the apparatus of the State has disappeared. In both cases, the organizations have benefited from external assistance. In both cases, the key to their achievements has been their own commitment to assisting the most vulnerable and their will to act.

As a result of the events that have taken place over the past few years, the attention of the international community has been drawn more and more towards complex emergencies. The International Federation has played its part in meeting the challenges these have posed. We feel, however, that there is a need to remind the international community of the occurrence of many other disasters caused by floods, storms or other natural phenomena, which also impose great burdens on individuals, peoples and countries. Examples include the drought-induced relief requirements in the Red Sea hills in Sudan and the continuing need to provide assistance in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The needs that have been identified in those two countries, among others, also serve to highlight the decline in food aid availability, a matter brought up at the recent World Food Summit, and the need to secure food supplies for emergency situations before using them for development purposes.

Having offered these few comments on the issue under consideration, the International Federation feels obliged to link this debate with the situation that has been unfolding in the Great Lakes region in Africa over the past few weeks. Improving the quality of humanitarian intervention, ensuring better coordination, achieving standards of behaviour and establishing technical standards are important indeed, but they will ultimately be fruitless unless there is a will among the international community to make use of the tools available and to foster circumstances that allow them to be used.

Unless the international community is willing to deal with the problems that cause emergencies of the magnitude we have witnessed, the humanitarian agencies will be unable to fulfil their mandates and could, indeed, contribute to the worsening, over the longer term, of the situation of those most vulnerable, whom they were created to assist.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. I should like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/51/L.22 and A/51/L.24, and any other draft resolutions to be submitted under this item, will be taken at a later date to be announced.

I should also like to inform members that the Assembly will consider sub-item (c) of agenda item 21, "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", at a later date to be announced.

Programme of work

The President: I would like to inform members that on Wednesday, 27 November, at 9.30 a.m., the General Committee will meet in Conference Room 4 to consider a request by a number of countries for the inclusion on the Assembly's agenda of an additional item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration" (A/51/232).

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.